

Reducing stress levels with benson therapy for mothers who have children with special needs

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ABSTRACT

Mothers of children with special needs may experience higher levels of stress due to stigma, social isolation, care burden, and financial expenses. A complementary therapy that can reduce stress levels is Benson therapy. To determine the effect of Benson therapy on stress levels in mothers of children with special needs. This study used a quantitative analysis method with a quasi-experimental (pre-test and post-test) design. Sampling technique with accidental sampling of as many as 35 respondents. Data collection was done using the DASS questionnaire with 16 question items and observation sheets. The collected data were processed with SPSS version 24.0 and analyzed with the Wilcoxon test. The research was conducted at SLB Negeri Ciamis in August 2023. The study found significant differences in maternal stress levels before and after Benson therapy intervention, from a mean \pm SD score of 3.17 ± 0.453 to a mean score of 4.63 ± 0.547 . There is an effect of Benson therapy on the stress level of mothers of children with special needs, with a significance level of p-value 0.000 ($p < 0.005$).

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INTRODUCTION

According to statistics published by the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture in June 2022, the disability rate for children aged 5-19 years is 3.3%. Meanwhile, the total population at that age is 66.6 million. Thus, the number of children aged 5-19 years with disabilities is around 2,197,833 (Rahayu & Ramadhanty, 2022). The West Java Central Bureau of Statistics recorded 20,000 children with special needs who attended special schools and based on data from the Ciamis district education office, 772 children with special needs attended special schools.

Raising a child with special needs can be tough, especially for mums (Eky Vikawati et al., 2019). Mothers of children with disabilities will be stigmatised for their child's limitations, overwhelmed with additional care needs, socially isolated, burdened by financial expenditure on care, and more likely to face challenges (Ang & Loh, 2019). This situation has the potential to cause stress (Noviati et al., 2021). Stress is an adjustment response that is necessitated by external

(environmental) actions, situations, or events that place undue psychological or physical demands on the individual (Sujartha, 2022).

Children with special needs can be challenging for parents, especially mothers. Mothers of children with special needs often experience higher levels of stress than mothers of children without special needs (Sukmawati et al., 2020)(Sukmawati et al., 2023). High levels of stress can affect the mental and physical health of the mother, so efforts need to be made to reduce these stress levels (Noviati, Sukmawati, Kurniawan, Ningrum, 2022). One therapy that can be used to reduce stress levels is Benson therapy.

Several studies have reported that mothers of children with special needs have higher levels of stress (Gilson et al., 2018). Mothers of children with special needs display a wide range of psychological symptoms including depression, anxiety and pessimism. (Hardi & Sari, 2019). Maternal stress on the quality of life of children with special needs will have a negative impact. Mothers with high stress tend to be authoritarian, abusive, and interact negatively with their children (Putri, 2020). This stress leads to a lack of quality mother-child relationships, particularly affecting the child's social life. The emotionally charged actions of the mother will affect how the child with special needs perceives and trusts the people around them (Al-Gamal & Long, 2013); (Gilson et al., 2018).

Benson relaxation is one of the complementary therapies to reduce stress levels. The benefits of Benson relaxation are reducing pain, overcoming sleep disorders (insomnia) and overcoming anxiety (Pardede & Tarigan, 2020). Benson therapy can help reduce physical and psychological stress, conceptually reducing epinephrine, lowering cortisol and other stress hormones. Benson relaxation techniques involve sitting quietly in a comfortable position, closing the eyes, relaxing all muscles deeply, starting from the feet, continuing to the face, keeping them relaxed, and breathing through the nose (Cahyati et al., 2022). Benson therapy has been widely used as a complementary therapy to reduce pain, anxiety and help psychological healing which increases patient recovery rates. Research Soumya Raj & Pillai, (2021) states that there is a significant difference between stress and pain in postpartum mothers with Benson therapy, which is statistically significant with a p value of <0.05. But there has been no research related to reducing stress levels in mothers with children with special needs. In this study, the similarity is in the independent variable, namely Benson Therapy. While the difference with this study is the Dependent Variable, namely the level of anxiety in mothers who have children with special needs.

SLBN Ciamis has 172 students, consisting of elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school children. Based on a preliminary survey, it was found that 7 out of 10 mothers who have children with special needs said that mothers have concerns related to their children's future, feelings of shame, and fatigue when caring for children. The results of the interview with the principal found that there was no related programme aimed at stress management, so it is likely that the stress of mothers of children with special needs is high. From this background, researchers are interested in conducting research with the aim of seeing whether there is an effect of Benson therapy on the stress level of mothers with children with special needs in SLBN Ciamis.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research is Pre-Experiment Design with one group pre-test and post-test design. Descriptive research method with a cross sectional approach. The research was conducted in August 2023. The sampling method used total sampling technique and obtained a sample of 35 respondents. The dependent variable in this study is the stress level of mothers with children with special needs, while the independent variable is Benson therapy. The study population was mothers with children with special needs who attended SLB Ciamis. The inclusion criteria are mothers who have children with special needs in grade 1 Primary School in SLB Ciamis and are willing to become respondents. While the exclusion criteria are mothers with children with special needs who live outside the city. The researcher's consideration took mothers with grade 1 special

needs children because mothers have no experience in parenting and have never been exposed to any information related to therapy in reducing anxiety levels.

Data collection techniques used primary and secondary data by conducting preliminary studies through interviews and involving parties from SLB Ciamis. The research instrument to see the mother's stress level used a questionnaire assessment of 14 items from the DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) (16). The research instrument used a 14-item DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) questionnaire with answer options: 0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, and 3 = very often. The DASS questionnaire has been standardized with the lowest validity value of 0.36 and the highest validity value of 0.71. Stress levels were divided into normal stress with scores of 0-14; mild stress with scores of 15-18; moderate stress with scores of 19-25; severe stress with scores of 26-33; and very severe stress with scores of ≥ 34 .

Stress levels were assessed during pre and post, i.e. before and after Benson Therapy was administered. Benson therapy is carried out by administering 4 steps, and is carried out before meals or 2 hours after meals because the digestive process will affect the resulting relaxation response. Benson therapy was carried out for 20 minutes in the morning and afternoon for 3 consecutive days from 25, 26 and 27 August 2023. Respondents were given an observation sheet that had to be filled in and assistance was provided through the Whats-up group. Researchers during the assistance always reminded when the Benson Therapy was carried out. Previously, respondents had been taught Benson Therapy until they could do it independently.

Data analysis using univariate where the results are presented in the form of frequency distribution and bivariate analysis to see differences before and after being given Benson Therapy with Wilcoxon test. All tests with p-value (p) < 0.05 were considered significant. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS application.

The research began with a preliminary study to obtain basic data at SLB Ciamis. Basic information was obtained from SLB Ciamis which had previously collaborated with the Office of National Unity and Politics (KESBANGPOL) and Community Protection of Ciamis Regency. Before the research began, the researcher had obtained Ethical Clearance with No. 003/KEPK-STIKESMUCIS/VII/2023 obtained from the Ethics Committee Board of STIKes Muhammadiyah Ciamis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Univariate analysis consisted of mother's age, mother's education, mother's income, child's category, child's age, child's status, child's gender. Can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents' characteristics of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Mother's Age		
Mature (19-44 years)	26	74.3
Pre-elderly (45-59 years)	8	22.9
Elderly (60 years and above)	1	2.9
Mother's Education		
Primary School	8	22.9
Junior High School	14	40.0
Senior High School	7	20.0
Diploma	3	8.6
Bachelor's Degree	3	8.6
Mother's Income		
> Regional Minimum Wage	2	5.7
< Regional Minimum Wage	33	94.3
Child Category		
Mildly impaired	10	28.6
Moderate Impairment	14	40.0
Autism Disabled	3	8.6

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Deafblind	6	17.1
Visually Impaired	2	5.7
Child Age		
Children (6-10 years)	14	40.0
Adolescent (10-19 years)	21	60.0
Child Status		
First	10	28.6
Second	17	48.6
Third	5	14.3
Fourth	1	2.9
Fifth	2	5.7
Child Gender		
Male	18	51.4
Female	17	48.6

Based on table 1, it is known that the highest maternal age is in the adult category as many as 26 people (74.3%). The highest category of maternal education is junior high school with as many as 14 people (40%). Maternal income is categorized as below the minimum wage as many as 33 people (94.3%). While the highest category of children is Moderate Impaired as many as 14 people (40%). The age of the most dominant child is in the range of 10-19 years, namely 21 people (60%), with the highest gender being male as many as 18 people (51.4%).

Table 2. Stress levels before and after Benson therapy

Category	Before Benson Therapy		After Benson Therapy		
	Frequency	Percent	Category	Frequency	Percent
Heavy	1	2.9	Medium	1	2.9
Medium	27	77.1	Mild	23	65.7
Light	7	20.0	Normal	11	31.4
Total	35	100.0	Total	35	100.0

Table 2 shows that before Benson therapy was given, the highest category of stress level was moderate stress, 27 people (77.1%). While after the administration of Benson therapy, the highest category is normal as many as 23 people (65.7%).

Stress is a feeling we generally get when we are under pressure, feel overwhelmed, or have difficulty dealing with a situation (Callanan et al., 2021). Stress within certain limits can have a positive impact and motivate us to achieve a goal. Table 2 shows that before the administration of Benson therapy, mothers had a moderate stress category with a frequency of 77.1%. Moderate stress is stress that is characterized by a longer period of stress, from several hours to several days. The response to this level of stress is obtained disorders of the stomach and intestines such as ulcers, irregular bowel movements, muscle tension, sleep pattern disorders, changes in the menstrual cycle, decreased concentration, and memory. The results of the questionnaire showed that the dominant respondent answered no 8 where the respondent had difficulty resting. A person's psychological condition can affect sleep. When there is tension in a person, anxiety will occur so that it will make it difficult for them to fall asleep. Symptoms experienced if there is a lack of sleep rest in mothers are difficulty falling asleep or achieving deep sleep. This can last all night and for days, weeks or even longer, feeling tired when waking up and not feeling refreshed, often not feeling asleep at all, headaches in the morning, difficulty concentrating, irritability, red eyes and daytime sleepiness (Bourke-Taylor et al., 2021).

Stress is influenced by management. Some influencing factors are education level and income. It is known that the dominant mother's education in the low category is junior high school as much as 40%. Low education will affect understanding of mental health, time management, and stress control strategies. Low education can also have an impact on physical and mental health. People with low levels of education are more likely to face chronic health problems due to lack of

access to information about health and good medical services. In addition, the social stigma associated with low education can increase the risk of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, which can exacerbate stress levels (Bhojti et al., 2020).

Table 1 shows that the dominant mother's income is categorized as below the minimum wage as much as 94.3%. Supported by the theory of (Maysa & Khairiyah, 2019) which states that mothers who have low incomes or who struggle to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and health care for children with special needs tend to experience higher levels of stress. Financial stress can affect a mother's physical and mental wellbeing. Mums with higher incomes have more control over choices, which can reduce stress levels. In contrast, mothers with lower incomes may be limited in their life choices, including the care of a child with special needs, and are therefore likely to face higher levels of stress.

The pretest results also showed that only 2.9% of mothers were categorized as severely stressed. Severe stress is defined as the inability to cope with excessive mental or emotional stress in daily life. This condition can be caused by disharmonious relationships, workload, debt, health problems, and others. In mothers with children with special needs, mothers who have severe stress are mothers who have their first child with special needs. Where mothers do not yet have experience in caring for children with special needs, coupled with caring for children with special needs which is draining and emotionally overwhelming (Dameria et al., 2019). Research (Bourke-Taylor et al., 2021) said that mothers of children with special needs tend to be emotionally sensitive and physically tired. On the emotional aspect, the impact of stress includes being sensitive and irritable, frustrated, and feeling helpless.

Based on table 2. The results of stress levels after Benson therapy are in the mild category as much as 65.7%. Mild stress is stress that does not damage the physiological aspects of a person. Mild stress is generally felt and faced by everyone regularly. In mothers who have children with special needs, stress levels tend to remain for life. From the results of pretest and posttest therapy, it is known that there is a decrease of 45.7% from moderate stress levels to mild stress levels. Some research results show a decrease in stress levels after Benson therapy (Soumya Raj & Pillai, 2021); (Parmar & Tiwari, 2021). Benson relaxation is a development of the respiratory relaxation response method involving patient belief factors that can create an internal environment, to help patients achieve a higher state of health and well-being. In addition to this technique being easy for patients to do, this relaxation can reduce medical costs and can be used to prevent stress, compared to the administration of chemical drugs for a long time which can cause side effects and endanger the wearer such as kidney problems (Anasari et al., 2015)

In this study, relaxation was carried out for 3 consecutive days, with morning and evening times for 20 minutes. This is in accordance with research conducted by Anisah & Maliya (2021) with the title "The Effectiveness of Benson Relaxation on Anxiety of Patients Undergoing Hemodialysis" where research shows that Benson relaxation which is done twice a day for 15-20 minutes is effective for overcoming anxiety problems in patients who do hemodialysis. The main purpose of Benson Therapy is to induce a relaxation response that can reduce stress levels. So it can help people who experience pressure and anxiety to feel calmer and more relaxed (Soumya Raj & Pillai, 2021). Benson relaxation is a development of the respiratory relaxation response method by involving the patient's belief factors, namely through soothing words in accordance with the patient's beliefs. Supported by Parmar & Tiwari (2021) Benson therapy has been shown to help lower blood pressure, lower heart rate, and reduce physical symptoms associated with stress, such as headaches and indigestion. This is supported by the Benson Therapy procedural where the respondent is instructed to calm down and relax the body muscles from the toes to the facial muscles so that the respondent feels relaxed. This can help reduce the physical tension that can build up due to chronic stress. Research conducted by Rahman et al., (2019) It was found that Benson therapy can help improve sleep quality. Practicing relaxation techniques can help one sleep better and wake up more refreshed. One of the advantages of Benson Therapy is that the

techniques can be practiced anytime and anywhere. It does not require any special equipment, making it easily accessible.

The results of the research conducted, approximately, the posttest results showed 20% of respondents who experienced a decrease from the mild to normal stress category. Meanwhile, when viewed from table 2, it can be concluded that the highest category is in the mild stress category. This means that the level of stress experienced by mothers who have children with special needs is a sedentary stress. Where the theory Budiarti & Hanoum (2019) stated that this stress will always be attached to the mother. Mothers of children with special needs have the responsibility of taking care of the household, fulfilling their husband's needs, and caring for other children. The existence of adversity can affect other areas of life of mothers of children with special needs, such as work, and socialization. In the area of work, it may result in disrupted concentration in performing tasks, which may result in decreased productivity. In socialization, it may interfere with her social life in the surrounding environment. If this situation continues, it will have an impact on their psychological condition. Mothers become exhausted, impatient, and negligent in childcare and eventually cause special needs stress in mothers (Syaputri & Afriza, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been done, Benson therapy can be an alternative to reduce stress levels in mothers who have children with special needs. There is an effect of Benson therapy on the stress level of mothers of children with special needs with a significance level of p -value 0.000 ($p < 0.005$). The weakness in this study, the time of Benson therapy was 3 days. Other studies are needed with the addition of time according to other references, namely 5-7 days so that the effect of Benson therapy can be maximised.

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